

‘The Final Hour’  
Good Friday 10.04.20.

The Hymn: ‘There is a green hill far away...’

1. When Jesus was dying on the cross we learn from the four Gospels that there were seven last sayings spoken by Jesus. The following three sayings, chosen for our meditation in this final hour, were spoken just before he yielded his spirit to God.

The Reading: St. Matthews Gospel 27. 45-54.

From St. Matthew’s Gospel 27v46 and from St. Mark’s Gospel 15v34. we read the words “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

With the forsakenness of Christ by God we truly enter the mystery of our salvation, and we may try to understand in some measure this deeply disturbing word of our Saviour, because the death of Jesus was not, as it has been said, merely an event among men but rather as an event between this one man and God. The centurion, on guard at the cross said, when Jesus breathed his last, “Truly this man was the Son of God”. (Mk15.30).

We may ask ourselves: What happened on the cross between God and Jesus? St Paul says “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree” (Gal3.13).

The law stated in Deuteronomy 21v 23 that “... a hanged man is accursed by God. The law of God makes demands. At the trial of Jesus before the Chief Priest and Council Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy and therefore guilty of death, and this sentence came about when Jesus confirmed before the council, under oath, that he was the Christ, the Son of God. (Matt 27.64). To all appearances Jesus was justified in his admission to be the Christ and it was the members of the Council who were self justified in condemning him for they believed to have kept the law. Self justification in any form becomes a sin because first of all it denies God to be the Giver of all things. To claim any form of self-righteousness or to justify ourselves makes us independent of the grace of God. Therefore Jesus was condemned not only because of our self-justification but he also carried the consequences of that self-justification.

Crucifixion was of course the Roman method of execution. But what is so important is that here we are able to see not only the forsakenness of Christ but also the identification of God with the dying Jesus, an identification that must be seen in the differentiation between God the Father and God the Son, a differentiation of God from God simply because, like the centurion, our faith defines the crucified man Jesus as the Son of God. St. Paul was to put it this way: “Jesus Christ...designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead”. (Roms1.4). Here we see divine action by divine being where our Lord’s resurrection has turned the final event of death into the event of life. The relationship of death and life has been turned around which is the determining character of love itself for “God is love”. (1Jn4.8).

It is at this point we follow up the aspect of our Lord’s substitution for us. It is true to say, in his life Jesus was the living substitute for God on earth, but then he became

our substitute in his death on the cross. In his life he was the one who worked in God's place, but the same person was the one who suffered and died in our place. But there is one important aspect for us constantly to keep before our minds and that is the Trinitarian work for our redemption. We return to the concept of differentiation. God the Holy Spirit who makes possible for God the Father and God the Son to be united in the death of Jesus. This is known as the chain of love that emphasizes God's eternal being for "God is love", "He who does not love abides in death" for death can only be turned around by love. For "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us". (1Jn3.14). "For this reason we know that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him". (1Jn4.9).

As we contemplate Jesus in his abandonment on the cross we are able to discern the eternal purpose of God in bringing mankind back into his embrace and for ourselves to be found in him by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

A Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, who by your bitter passion tasted death for every person, and carried our sins in your own body on the cross. Grant to us, we pray a broken and a contrite heart for all thy sorrows, and for the forgiveness of our sins in your most precious blood; that we may live as those who have been bought with a price, and glory only in the your cross. Amen.

The Hymn: 'When I survey the wondrous cross...'

2. The Reading: St. Luke's Gospel, 23 verses 34-49.

In v 46 we have the words of Jesus when he cried out with a loud voice "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last".

In the opening words in the Letter to the Hebrews there is a grand vision of the supremacy of Christ over prophets and angels and in verses 2-4 we see Christ as genuine and absolute Deity, the outshining of God's glory, the eternal Son of the Father, very God of very God. Further on it says The Son is the author and sustainer of the universe. By him it was made and he upholds it (10f). In these words we see the purpose and plan of the Son of God coming from God the Father into the world, in the man Jesus, in order to include mankind as family members and companions in his new creation.

Of course there must be a clear distinction between the eternal presence of God and our creaturely existence because of the giving of grace and of our own response of faith, for Christ is the original image of God's purpose for all who believe.

St. Paul speaks of this image "...since man is the image and glory of God". (1Cor11.7), and again in 1 Corinthians 15v49 we read "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven".

It was natural for Jesus when dying on the cross for him to implore his Father, but he did so by example as one among his own disciples for he taught them also to pray to the Father in heaven. To speak of God as 'Father' was virtually unknown in Israel. He is the Creator, the Lord of life and death. In no circumstances should one forget that the Lordship of God is fundamental. The gift of being a child of God brings the

certainty not only of God's intimate care of the disciple but also the share of an inheritance of salvation "...not one of these little ones should perish". (Matt 18.14).

Of course, our reverence before God is always the essential part of calling him Lord and King, but for the disciple of Jesus, God is also the Father. In his 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matt 5-7). Jesus often spoke the words "Your Father in heaven..." his care and security; his provision, guidance and direction. God's Fatherhood places a new light on suffering and not least of all at this moment when Jesus was about to breathe his last, he placed his spirit into his Father's care. Even in death God's Fatherhood appears in a different light. The prayer Jesus made was the prayer of a child placing its trust in God because the Father knows all things. It was the expression of faith. Says St. Paul "When we cry "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God". (Roms8.16). Our Lord must have used this same word "Abba!" from the cross and he now empowers us as his disciples to say the same "Abba"! because we also may have the assurance of being, like Jesus, a child of God.

But let us draw this second meditation to a close by reminding ourselves that although God, by his Son, has become speakable, addressable and knowable and to call God our Father, we cannot do this without God the Holy Spirit. We have already reminded ourselves of the Spirit confirming our place with God as children, but it is in the power of the Holy Spirit we share ourselves rather than possess ourselves. We are brothers and sisters in and with Christ. Because God is our Father we no longer speak about God but we really speak of God to each other. We are constantly drawn out of ourselves and this happens in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our faith in God is simultaneously faith in God the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

So let us remember this wonderful prayer of Jesus on the very cross itself "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit", and for ourselves to use it regularly.

A Prayer: Abba, Father, in whom our Saviour trusted as in life so in death: We bless thee for this last prayer which marked the commitment of Jesus into your hands. Give to us so strong a faith and a ready obedience that when our life on earth draws to its close, we may not fear to surrender ourselves into your hands as our all-loving Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Hymn: 'Rock of Ages cleft for me...

### 3. The Reading from St. John's Gospel 19.17-30.

In verse 30 we have the words of Jesus: "When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit".

It was Martin Luther who said "In this word "It is finished" will I comfort myself. I am forced to confess that all my finishing of the will of God is imperfect. What the law requires, Christ has performed".

Nothing can atone to holiness but holiness and it must be the holiness of one who alone has the power to meet the holiness of God. The finished work of our Lord on the cross brings us to that very point of his confession of God's holiness arising from the extreme condition of sin.

We must think carefully what this means in that our Lord's sacrifice did not necessarily answer man's need so much as to what was required by God's holy law.

In the Old Testament the offerings of animal sacrifices were carefully prescribed for a person's approach to God. These offerings were of a temporary nature as it says in Hebrews 10.verse 43f "...in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin". Now it is true that when Christ died on the cross he confessed human sin and by his deep love for mankind he entered into the judgement of our sin. There is a penalty and a curse for sin as we learned from the first meditation "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal3.17). But it is a contradiction to say that God was angry with his beloved Son. Yes, Christ entered the judgement of God upon sin yet his confession differs from ours, for what our Lord confessed in his perfect offering of himself was the holiness of God including the action of God's judgement that came upon him. The great work of Christ, while it did confess human sin was to confess something far greater as only he could do, namely God's holiness. "Thou art holy in all thy ways including this judgement that has fallen on me". We need therefore to remember the distinction between God's changeless love for his Son. God made him sin, treated him as if he were sin, but he did not view him as sinful. God lovingly treated him as sin and with his consent judged sin in him, but personal guilt Christ could never confess. Only the guilty can admit to guilt. "I did it" is something our Lord could never say for that is our confession, and we cannot make it effectively until we come to God. This is the finished work of Christ for our redemption, not so much in words but by act and deed. Our Lord's death was one with his whole life of sinlessness, not only his earthly life but from all eternity as St. Paul says: "According to the eternal purpose which God has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Eph3.11). The death of Christ is the central point of all eternity as well as human history, as St. Peter says "He was destined before the foundation of the World"! (1Peter1.10).

The unforgivable sin is to sin against the cross for that ultimately means to sin against the Holy Spirit. But let us remind ourselves that "... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2Cor5.19), not through Christ but present in him, for as St. John says: "...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is he propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world". (1Jn2.2). We are all placed now before the cross of Christ for all judgement is committed to him. But now, we must leave this 'Final Hour' and on this particular day, Good Friday, for our dead Lord to be taken down from the cross and buried in the tomb until, after three days, we see his glorious resurrection. Said Jesus "It is finished", and he bowed his head and breathed his last". Thanks be to God.

A Prayer. Dear God, who by the cross and passion of thy Son Jesus Christ fully accomplished the redemption of mankind: Grant that by steadfast faith in the merits of that holy sacrifice we may find our whole salvation, and may triumph in the power of his victory, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Hymn: 'My song is love unknown...'

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen

